

Voters First Advisory Commission

Workshop

Wednesday June 13, 2007

Room 203 State House

Commission Members Present:

Secretary of State A. Ralph Mollis

Representative Joseph Almeida

Representative Jon Brien

Ken McGill, Pawtucket Board of Canvassers

Bob Kando, Director, RI Board of Elections

Jan Ruggiero, Director, Secretary of State's Elections Division

Sue Stenhouse, Deputy Director, Governor's Office of Community Relations

Staff Members Present:

Paul Caranci, Deputy Secretary of State

Pam Lombardi, Administrative Assistant

Chris Barnett, Communications Director

General Public Present:

Amy Vitale, ACLU

Maria Lopes, MLC

Christine Lopes, Common Cause RI

Paul Santilli, Johnston

Summary of Meeting:

Secretary Mollis updated the Commissioners on the following:

- 1. Capitol TV will cover most hearings, including Providence and Warwick. They are working on arrangements to provide coverage for URI and Middletown as well.**
- 2. All hearing sites have been finalized and a list of dates and sites was provided to all Commissioners.**
- 3. Staff has handout for Commissioners pertaining to news articles from other states.**
- 4. Sign-up Process for Future Public Hearings:**
 - a. Attendees will sign in and check a box on the sign-in sheet if they want to speak.**
 - b. Those who sign-up and haven't spoken at a previous hearing will speak first.**
 - c. Those who didn't sign-up and have not spoken at a previous hearing will be asked if they want to speak.**
 - d. Those who spoke previously will be allowed to speak again.**
- 5. We have requested a cordless microphone for those who can't get to the standing microphone.**
- 6. Speakers will be asked to refrain from making political comments.**
- 7. Commissioners will be introduced and can make a statement.**

General Discussion:

Sue Stenhouse suggested that speakers be limited to 5-10 minutes

depending upon how many speakers there are. If they are not able to make all their points during that time, they will be invited to speak again at the end of the meeting to finish. It was a consensus of the group to adopt this procedure, but to determine the amount of time each speaker will have based on the number of speakers signed up.

Rep. Almeida questioned the procedure when a member of the Commission can't make a meeting at which a topic of interest to that member is being discussed. Secretary Mollis said he envisions the Commissioners working with staff to develop a position paper on each topic of interest. Therefore, every Commissioner will have an opportunity to weigh in on each issue regardless of attendance at a hearing or workshop. In response to a question by Sue Stenhouse, Secretary Mollis noted that while he does not envision the Commission taking a formal vote on each issue, the Commission may do that if they so choose.

Rep. Almeida felt that at the last hearing we played to the media by allowing a discussion on photo ID from a pro voice on the issue while not presenting the opposing view. He distributed several documents presenting an opposing view for the Commissioners review, and asked that in the future those type discussions be limited to the workshops, not the public hearings. It was a consensus of the Commissioners that the suggestion be honored.

A discussion ensued regarding the removal of deceased people from the voter lists. Rep. Almeida supports an idea put forth by Terry Gorman at the Lincoln public hearing that would utilize information

provided by undertakers to notify the state of recent deaths. Jan Ruggiero explained that the Secretary's Office is working now with the Department of Health who will provide an electronic file of deaths.

She and Bob Kando explained how the process would work.

Rep. Almeida and Bob Kando also addressed the issue of voter fraud.

Rep. Almeida said that there are no documented cases of fraud. Bob Kando noted that ProJo reported Steve Peoples tried to prove fraud with his story about the discrepancy in the number of voters from lists compiled by the Board of Elections and the Secretary of State. In the end, it came down to one voter and the deceased person that is recorded as having voted has a son by the same name. Therefore, even that one case may not represent any fraud.

The issues raised by Sue Stenhouse regarding multiple registration by college students and people who move from one town to another without removing the name from the original town's voter list, will be resolved through the CVRS. Jan also noted, in response to Commissioner Stenhouse's issue with a number of pieces of mail being returned in the last election, that there are several lists maintained by the Boards of Canvassers or the Secretary of State. If the request is unclear, a candidate may get the wrong list and mail will be returned. This happens for many reasons, but none are necessarily fraudulent. Jan Ruggiero suggested that the Secretary of State provide a form for use by local Boards when a request is made for a voting list. The form can spell out the different types of lists and their uses so no mistakes will be made when a request is made.

Regarding photo ID, Jan Ruggiero noted that an associate from the

DMV told her that RI is one of the states that will use Real ID. The program, while costly, is being paid for with funds from Homeland Security. Sue Stenhouse also noted that federal legislation may require Voter Photo ID. If it passes, RI will have to comply, so we may want to focus some discussion on how best to implement such a requirement so that all issues are taken into account and no one is left behind rather than focus so much on whether or not we want it.

The Next Public Hearing is Monday, June 18th at 6:30 at CCRI – 1 Hilton St., Prov.